

## Abstract 321

**TITLE: *PROMOTORES DE SALUD*:** Training Migrant & Seasonal Workers in HIV/AIDS Awareness and Prevention

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**TITLE:** Bridging the Language and Cultural Gap: Reaching Migrant and Seasonal Farm workers With an HIV/AIDS Prevention Message Using Peer Health Educators

**ISSUE:** Migrant and seasonal farm workers, many of who are foreign-born, non-English-speaking and lacking in formal education, have been largely untouched by the JBV prevention message. Large numbers believe that HIV can be transmitted through casual contact, like kissing or innocuous behavior, such as giving blood. Many male farm workers are reluctant to use condoms, due to concerns about pleasure, myths that condoms affect masculinity and financial constraint concerning cost. Farm worker women often rely on monogamy or do nothing to protect them. Farm workers and their families are at high risk for HIV/AIDS and the National Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality estimates that the rate of infection among farm workers is 10 times higher than the national average. Infection rates among farm worker families are also facilitated by high rates of sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancy, the use of alcohol and drugs, the frequent use of prostitutes and the practice of injecting vitamins or antibiotics.

**SETTING:** Two communities on the US -Mexico border were selected for this peer education project, McAllen, Texas and Yuma, Arizona. Farm workers were educated in the fields, before and after work and at break-times. Other farm workers and their family members were reached in their homes, churches, schools, or community centers.

**PROJECT:** Two national organizations, the Farm worker Justice Fund, Inc. and the National Council of La Raza worked with local community-based organizations at each site including the Valley AIDS Council and Campesmos Sin Fronteras (Farm workers Without Borders), to recruit, train and supervise 50 farm worker men, women and youth, to serve as *promotores de salud* or lay health educators, to bring the HIV/AIDS prevention message to farm worker families. The *promotores* (peer educators) were trained in a today intensive, participatory workshop using a culturally and linguistically appropriate curriculum, which was specifically designed for farm workers and their family members. The *promotores* then went into the community and educated a minimum of 10 farm worker family members each month over an 8-month period. Where possible, the peer educators prepared a contact report on each educational ion, obtained a pre-training questionnaire from each participant to gauge the level of knowledge of HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention and provided farm workers with appropriate referrals. The Arizona group primarily targeted farm workers at work; the Texas group focused on farm worker families at home, going house-to-house in colonies where they live. The peer educators also met on a monthly basis to share experiences and receive additional training. For their efforts they were paid a small stipend.

**RESULTS:** The *promotores* educated more than 3,700 farm worker family members in an 8-month period and made hundreds of referrals for HIV testing and other health services. They also obtained pre-training questionnaires from 1,227 participants showing that farm workers lack basic information about HIV transmission and often use ineffective prevention strategies.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** (1) Well-trained supervised peer educators can reach often hard-to-find farm workers and their family members and effectively deliver an HIV/AIDS prevention message. (2) Significant misconceptions concerning HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention remain widespread in the farm worker community, so that prevention education remains a high priority. (3) Farm workers who are trained as peer educators learn that they can act to protect themselves, their families, and their neighbors. They also help bridge the cultural and linguistic gap between public health educators and the farm worker community. (4) Efforts to obtain post-training information on farm workers were impeded by farm workers' pervasive fear of immigration authorities and their reluctance to be associated with anything related to HIV/AIDS.

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